

MULTIPURPOSE MASK

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention relates to a mask that protects the mouth and nose but which provides a closable opening so that the wearer is able to eat or drink without having to remove the mask. This multipurpose mask allows for insertion of devices through the mask while the mask is on.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Filtration respirators, or face masks, have been widely used in the past to protect the respiratory system from particulate or chemical agents. These masks are designed to minimize the transmission of contagious diseases or to protect the respiratory system from toxic substances or allergens in the surrounding atmosphere.

[0003] Protective face masks are generally used for preventing the transmission of contagious diseases, as well as to protect from inhalation of industrial or city dust or dirt, chemicals, allergens, and the like that may be present in the atmosphere. These masks are used to maintain a private, enclosed space around the breathing orifices when a person is in close proximity to other persons, or if an undesirable atmospheric agent is present. Additionally, infectious persons can wear masks to protect other people in the vicinity from their pathogens.

[0004] A variety of masks have been proposed which have different features, such as different ways of retaining the mask in place, providing different degrees of comfort for the wearer, having inhaling or exhausting valves, different types of seals around the mask for tighter sealing of the mask to the wearer's face. Other features include impregnating the mask with certain chemicals to make the mask more effective against air borne substances, and sterilizing the mask to enhance its cleanliness.

[0005] However, when the wearer wishes to eat or drink, all of the above masks must be removed so that food or drink can be imbibed. Of course, removing the mask means that the face is no longer protected.

[0006] Examples of some of these types of masks can be found in U.S. Patent No. 2,494,406, which shows a protective mask which has elastic temple straps attached to the mask to enhance the conforming to the face of the wearer.

[0007] U.S. Patent No. 6,098,201 shows a molded face mask made of a plastic sheet in which a deformable wire is embedded so that the mask better conforms to the wearer's face.

[0008] U.S. Patent No. 4,827,923 shows a protective facial mask that slips over the user's head.

[0009] U.S. Patent No. 6,123,077 discloses a mask with a flat central panel to which other panels are joined through a fold line, seam, weld, or bond.

[0010] U.S. Patent No. 4,974,586 shows a breathing mask which comprises an inhalation valve disposed in an opening of the wall of the mask. The inhalation valve opens at a sufficiently low breathing pressure to make it comfortable.

[0011] U.S. Patent No. 5,699,792 shows a face mask with an enhanced facial seal.

[0012] U.S. Patent No. 5,701,892 shows a two-sided chamber held away from the entrance of the nostrils and the mouth by a rigid support.

[0013] U.S. Patent No. 4,941,470 shows a face mask having pleats formed therein and a method for fabricating the mask.

[0014] U.S. Patent No. 6,394,090 shows a respiratory device having first and second lines of demarcation bisected by a fold so that the device can be folded.

[0015] U.S. Patent No. 4,856,509 discloses a face mask containing a chemical or biological agent that destroys microorganisms such as viruses and bacteria.

[0016] U.S. Patent No. 5,819,731 shows a face mask having a combination of adjustable ear loops and drop down band for a snug fit.

[0017] U.S. Patent No. 5,717,991 shows a disposable sanitary mask comprising a cover panel section adapted to cover the wearer's nose and mouth and a pair of ear loops and panel sections to prevent the mask from losing its shape.

[0018] U.S. Patent No. 5,735,270 discloses a disposable foldable face mask with face seal characteristics for a high efficiency filtering medium.

[0019] U. S. Patent No. 6,213,125, disclose a device for protecting the face of the wearer including a gas pervious mask dimensioned to fit over the nose and mouth and a shield to protect the eyes of the wearer.

[0020] U.S. Patent No. 6,332,465 discloses face masks having elastic polyolefin thermoplastic bands attached thereto by heat and pressure.

[0021] U.S. Patent No. 6,055,982 discloses a face mask which prevents transmission of air borne aerosols, particulate matter, and/or liquids, having an enhanced fluid barrier between the periphery of the mask and the wearer's face.

[0022] However, in all of these masks, when the wearer wishes to eat or drink, the mask must be removed, subjecting the wearer to the very allergens, chemicals, etc. from which the mask is worn to protect the wearer.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0023] It is an object of the present invention to overcome the aforesaid deficiencies in the prior art.

[0024] It is another object of the present invention to provide a protective mask that need not be removed when the wearer wishes to eat or drink.

[0025] It is a further object of the present invention to provide a multipurpose mask that allows the wearer to insert devices into the mouth without removing the mask.

[0026] It is yet another object of the present invention to maintain some protection from the environment even when the wearer requires hydration or nutrients.

[0027] It is still another object of the present invention to provide a unique mask that can allow insertion through the mask of different devices that may be needed at different times.

[0028] It is another object of the present invention to provide a mask that can be worn by the user for extended periods of time that are not limited to times not needed for sustenance of the wearer.

[0029] It is a further object of the present invention to provide a simple and economical mask that protects the wearer from impurities and irritants in the surrounding atmosphere at all times.

[0030] The mask of the present invention is uniquely designed to have at least one opening or area that can be opened so that the wearer can take nourishment or insert needed devices, such as an oxygen tube, without removing the mask. This opening or area is located near the mouth of the wearer to make nourishment accessible, preferably within a short distance from the mouth.

[0031] The area designed for introduction of nourishment is readily re-closed after nourishment is taken, or the device is removed, thus providing the greatest degree of protection for the wearer. This area can be a hole which can be closed by a flap when not needed, or closed by a totally detachable patch. Alternatively, the area can be a closed area that permits a delivering device, such as a straw, spoon or tube, to be inserted, and which self closes or self reseals once the wearer no longer needs the device.

[0032] The mask of the present invention has a multiplicity of functions, while being economical to manufacture. The device can be used in airplanes, dance studios, subways, offices, schools, hospitals, post offices, governmental offices, shopping centers, homes or any other place where protection is needed without sacrificing hydration or sustenance for the wearer.

[0033] At times such as the present, in which dangerous health risks can be present anywhere in the surrounding atmosphere, the present invention provides protection from the environment even when the wearer needs hydration or nutrition.

[0034] The masks can be packaged individually and dispensed from vending machines.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0035] Figure 1 is a schematic front view of one embodiment of a mask according to the present invention.

[0036] Figure 2 is a schematic side view of the mask of Figure 1.

[0037] Figure 3 is a schematic front view of another mask with attachments to keep it in place.

[0038] Figure 3a shows a schematic side view of the multipurpose mask of Figure 3

[0039] Figure 4 shows a front view of yet another embodiment of a mask on a wearer.

[0040] Figure 4a is a schematic side view of Figure 4 with a device inserted through the central point of the flexible area.

[0041] Figure 5 shows another embodiment of a mask with a single aperture, and Figure 5a shows the detachable cover for the mask.

[0042] Figure 5a is a schematic diagram of a detachable cover for use on the mask shown in Figure 5.

[0043] Figures 6A and 6B are schematic sketches of two types of multipurpose mask according to the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0044] Figure 1 shows one embodiment of a mask according to the present invention. The mask is made of any type of material that can be comfortably worn, either flexible or inflexible. In the area approximately covering the mouth of a wearer, a piece of flexible, elastic material 10 is attached to the mask indicated by 10a except for an area which approximately covers the lower lip of the wearer indicated by 10b, which is free. This elastic or flexible material is also used to form a separate cover for the upper or high lip of the wearer 11. The high lip 11 is attached to the mask indicated by 11a except for the lower edge of the high lip 11b. The free edge 11b of the high lip extends over the free edge of the low lip 10b.

[0045] The mask may be retained in place on the wearer by a variety of means, including loops over the ears 12, or an elastic band 12a stretching across the back of the wearer's head.

[0046] Figure 2 shows a side view of the mask of Figure 1 in place on a wearer. Bands 12 hold the mask in place on the

wearer by encircling the ears of the wearer. The opening provided in the mask to permit the wearer to eat or drink without the necessity for removing the mask is shown with a device 20 inserted between the high lip 11 and the low lip 10 in the mouth of the wearer.

[0047] Another embodiment of a mask according to the present invention is shown in Figure 3. This mask has an aperture 13 in approximately the location of the wearer's mouth, which aperture 13 is covered by a flap 14 attached to the mask above the aperture indicated by 15. The lower part of the flap 15a is lightly attached to the mask so that the flap 14 can be raised when the wearer chooses to ingest food or beverages. Figure 3a is a side view of the mask of Figure 3 showing the solid flap 14 and the aperture 13 behind the flap 14 so that the wearer can insert a device through such aperture when the bottom of the flap 15a is raised.

[0048] Figure 4 shows another embodiment of a mask according to the present invention having an area of elastic or flexible material 16 that is self-closing. That is, the flexible, or elastic self-closing area 16 is designed to close near the center of the flexible material.

[0049] Figure 4a illustrates how the flexible material 16 opens when, for example, a bottleneck 41 is inserted into the area of the flexible material 16 so that the wearer can ingest

the contents of the bottle. Once the bottleneck 41 is removed, the flexible area 16 self-seals so that the mouth of the wearer is protected.

[0050] Figure 5 shows a mask having a single orifice or aperture 17 through which the wearer can insert food or drink into the wearer's mouth. A detachable cover 18 covers the orifice when the wearer is not eating or drinking. This cover 18 can be attached to the mask by any conventional attaching or adhesive means, such as hook and loop closures, reusable adhesive, snaps, hooks and eyes, etc.

[0051] Figure 5a shows the detachable cover 18 with an adhesive 19 around the periphery of the cover.

[0052] While the mask has been shown for purposes of illustration as a face mask, the mask can be made in any configuration, such as a complete covering of the head.

[0053] Figures 6A and 6B illustrate two different styles of masks according to the present invention. Figure 6A shows a mask 1 which covers the lower half of the face of the wearer. Bands 4, 5, 6, and 7 hold the mask in place by encircling the ears of the wearer. An area 3 is provided for insertion and withdrawal of tubes, food, beverages, etc. Figure 6B shows a mask 2 which covers the head of the wearer except for the eyes. An area 3 is provided for inserting and withdrawing foods, beverages, tubes, and the like.

[0054] At least part of the mask covering the mouth and nose of the wearer must comprise a filtering media in order to protect the wearer from airborne particulates, microorganisms, etc. The portions of the mask not formed of filtering media may be formed of a variety of materials, such as a material which provides a moisture barrier to prevent fogging of a wearer's glasses.

[0055] The filtering portion of the mask of the present invention, can be made of any acceptable material which will filter airborne pathogens or dust. Thus, the mask can be made of any of a number of woven or nonwoven materials, a single layer or a plurality of layers, with or without an inner or outer cover or scrim, and with or without a stiffening means or the mask can be molded. Examples of suitable filter material include microfiber webs, fibrillated film webs, woven or non-woven webs (e.g., airlaid or carded staple fibers), solution-blown fiber webs, or combinations thereof. Fibers useful for forming such webs include, for example, polyolefins such as polypropylene, polyethylene, polybutylene, poly(4-methyl-1-pentene), and blends thereof; halogen substituted polyolefins such as those containing one or more chloroethylene units or tetrafluoroethylene units, and which may also contain acrylonitrile units; polyesters;

polycarbonates; polyurethanes; rosin-wool; glass; cellulose or combinations thereof.

[0056] Fibers of the filtering material are selected depending on the type of particulate to be filtered. Proper selection of fibers can also affect the comfort to the wearer, which is of great importance when the mask is to be worn for an extended period of time, such as on a long flight. Fibers can be selected to provide softness or moisture control, for example. Webs of melt blown fibers can be prepared as described, for example, in Wentz, *Industrial Engineering Chemistry* **48**, 1342 et seq. (1956). Blown microfibers used in masks according to the present invention preferably have an effective diameter of from about 3 to about 30 microns, more preferably from about 7 to 15 microns.

[0057] Staple fibers may also, optionally, be present in the mask. The presence of crimped, bulking staple fibers provides for a more lofty, less dense web than a web consisting solely of blown microfibers. Preferably, no more than 90 weight percent should be staple fibers, and more preferably, no more than 70 weight percent, of the filtering material should be staple fibers. Webs containing staple fibers are disclosed in Hauser, U.S. Patent No. 4,118,531, the entire contents of which are hereby incorporated by reference.

[0058] The mask may also be made of bicomponent staple fibers.

[0059] In the mask embodiment in which the aperture is covered by a separate flap, the flap can be made of any type of material which is not irritating to the wearer. The flap may be of flexible, semi-rigid, or rigid material, although flexible material is preferred because it provides a closer fit over the aperture, thus better protecting the wearer's mouth.

[0060] The foregoing description of the specific embodiments will so fully reveal the general nature of the invention that other can, by applying current knowledge, readily modify and/or adapt for various application such specific embodiments without undue experimentation and without departing from the generic concept. Therefore, such adaptations and modifications should and are intended to be comprehended within the meaning and range of equivalents of the disclosed embodiments.

[0061] It is to be understood that the phraseology or terminology employed herein is for the purpose of description and not of limitation. The means and materials for carrying out various disclosed functions may take a variety of alternative forms without departing from the invention.

[0062] Thus, the expressions "means to..." and "means for..." as may be found in the specification above and/or in the claims below, followed by a functional statement, are intended to define and cover whatever structural, physical, chemical, or electrical element or structures which may now or in the future exist for carrying out the recited function, whether or nor precisely equivalent to the embodiment or embodiments disclosed in the specification above. It is intended that such expressions be given their broadest interpretation.